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THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OUTLOOK.

I.

**The Two Opposing
Party Forces in
American Politics.**

FOR the first time in thirty years the Democratic party holds the trump cards in the political pack. It has only to play them to win. The record of an administration which has addressed itself to the business of the country with cleanliness and directness ; the possession of the National House of Representatives at a moment when the reduction of taxation is an inexorable demand of an over-flowing treasury ; and the personal character of a candidate who has impressed the popular imagination variously, but on the whole favorably, and whose renomination is assured without a contest, complete a very strong hand.

It is the Republican party, whose discipline and tactics have been so invincible in days gone by, which is irresolute and which trusts to luck. It has only a single suit to lead from, and this it has nearly, if not quite, exhausted. Out of a throng of brilliant captains, but one whose name excites universal enthusiasm remains to it, and on him there appears to have fallen, with the genius and renown, also the fatality of Henry Clay. That luck may save it, as luck has saved it, is possible. But there is bad luck no less than good luck, and Burchard did not look like good luck, which, having whipped over to Cleveland and the Democrats, seems to stay with them.

Thus we find a leader so considerable as Sherman talking one way in Tennessee and another way in Illinois ; whilst lesser lights of the party, with the Governor of Ohio at their head, plunge with the recklessness of men who have nothing to lose. These things have the air of ill omens. The battle-flag incident, on the other hand, furnished a curious instance of the President's continuous good luck. Though an official blunder, it turned out to his advan-

tage. It completely and prematurely developed the hand of his adversaries ; startling the country by the lurid spectre of a Red Republicanism it had not suspected, and warning the Administration of a danger to be avoided. If such an accident had come about in the heat of a national campaign it might, and perhaps it would, have precipitated irretrievable disaster. Falling upon a tranquil state of public feeling, it simply disclosed a conspiracy to rob the treasury, and produced a reaction among the tax-payers.

Within his competency, indeed, the President is a crafty politician, and the use to which he put the violence of his critics had done credit to an older strategist. It did add immensely to his strength with those who regard the office of Chief Magistrate as the representative of the sovereignty of the people, commanding the respect of all, without regard to party association. Before the eyes of these, at least, the defender of its dignity stood in the character of a sacred bull. More than this could not have been achieved by the most astute diplomatist.

II.

The President and His Happy-Go-Lucky Policy. Peter Simple's ingenious friend surmised, in accepting the challenge of a famous duellist to fight with rapiers, that the expert would be more disconcerted by his adversary's lack of skill than helped to a victory by his own superior swordmanship ; which, indeed, was proved to be true by the issue of the encounter. Such freaks of humor used to be common and favorite devices with a certain class of play-writers. Mr. Pierce O'Hara on the race-course and Sir Patrick O'Plenipo in diplomacy perpetrated blunders enough to baffle all calculation and keep the audience in a perpetual roar ; yet, somehow, to their amazement, everything went to their profit—worked, as far as they were concerned, by the rule of contraries. The President seems to be a lineal descendant of these happy-go-lucky sons of Irish wit.

He came to Washington not merely unqualified by antecedent experience for the duties of the Presidency, which he had reached by a succession of events unequaled except in comic opera, or the Hibernian drama, but disqualified by a conviction that he was himself the one honest man in the public life of the country. The oldest and best known members of the party which had elected him—barring Mr. Bayard—were ignored with the

most unconscious disdain. Even such men as Thurman and McDonald were left to find their way to the White House as best they might, or to stay away if they liked that better. A smart attorney was discovered hid away in a little Republican pocket-borough, and placed at the head of our Diplomatic Service in Europe. The Congress of the United States was considered and treated as much the same sort of body as the Legislature of the State of New York. Each day brought in its sensations and surprises, until the reorganized official fabric—at home and abroad—had Americanized the French saying that it is the impossible which happens.

The government thus formed has existed nearly three years, to execute the conceits of this self-confident and well-intentioned theory of Administration; and for all the blunders—and truly our melodramatic Celtic friends could hardly have perpetrated more or greater ones—who that knows the state of the public mind shall say that the President is not stronger than he was when he took the oath of office? He has flouted the functionaries; and there is that in human nature which takes a secret satisfaction in seeing its favorites come to grief. He has had his own way, and carried it with an exceedingly high hand; and this has pleased the image-makers and the worshipers of sturdy independence. He has worked like a hodman himself, and commanded others to work in the language of an overseer; and this has identified him with Mr. Lincoln's "plain people," and aroused a sense of fellow-feeling never before existing between a chief magistrate and the far-away masses. Back of all, two fine and real elements of beneficent power have stood on the right and the left of this favorite child of fortune, unflinching integrity, and robust common-sense. I cannot, for my part, help admiring the good that is in him, and when I consider the good it has brought in excess of the evil—which might have attended the efforts of one less blessed in his cradle—I almost forgive his inconsiderate personal behavior, his disregard of the claims of the aged, and the counsels of the wise, in the political family of which he was, until raised to chiefhood, the merest cadet.

It is my opinion, therefore, that he will be re-elected, and that we shall have four years more of an administration that pleases nobody very much, but which does strike a kind of general average, continuing the policy of letting well enough alone, which

falls in so aptly with the prevailing spirit of material progress and money-getting developed at the South at last in a degree hardly less eager than at the North ; a spirit which has no time to quarrel about exploded issues, nor temper to listen to disturbing theories from humane agitators.

III.

False Hopes and Fears Among the Party Leaders. The coming session of Congress will meet amid a great confusion of ideas and clashing of interests. But here, as elsewhere, the Democrats will find themselves in possession of all the strategic positions. Those Republicans who think that there is campaign capital to be made for their party out of the tariff, and who affect the wish that this may become the battle-line of political controversy, base their conclusion upon the belief that the Democrats are irremediably divided and muddled upon the question, and the hope that Democratic failure to unite and pass a bill will prove fatal to the Democratic ticket in the ensuing Presidential election.

The case stands otherwise. The fruits of unjust taxation are at length visible to the naked eye in a vast surplus needlessly wrung from the people and lying idle in the Treasury. This raises a question which is bound to be settled, and which the politicians cannot shirk. 1st. The surplus must be disposed of. 2d. Its recurrence must be prevented. There are many ways of disposing of the surplus, but there are but two ways of preventing its recurrence. These latter present to time-servers the dilemma of abolishing the internal taxes on whisky and tobacco, or reducing the duties on imports. On that issue, the Democratic party, led by the Democratic administration, will be substantially united in favor of lower import duties; and if a measure to this end be defeated, the responsibility will rest where it will belong, with the Republicans.

Nor need the Republicans expect anything from the extremism of the Free Traders, as they persist in naming the Revenue Reformers, or from the recalcitrancy of the handful of Protectionists who masquerade as Democrats. These middle men are mainly from Pennsylvania and Ohio, sure Republican States, and will be dismissed as common enemies after they have been given and have refused a fair chance to act with their party. The

majority of the party is in as little mood to put up with mere doctrinal trifling as with individual performances. It is led in the national House of Representatives by conservative and enlightened men, and the tariff training they have had the last four years has not been without its instruction. They are ready for practical legislation and equipped for debate. The measure, therefore, which they are likely to frame will embrace none of the features so glibly foretold by the Republican press and hailed so gleefully by the Republican managers. It will contain a series of provisions so tangible and plain as to mark the clearest distinction of party lines, and to leave no doubt in the minds of intelligent men—anticipating the assembling of the national Democratic convention, and constituting in advance the tariff plank in the national Democratic platform. Nor will its authors be thrust by a factional organization of the National Democratic Committee out of the next Presidential campaign, as the friends of Revenue Reform were thrust out of the last. They will be present in the East no less than in the West to advocate the views of the majority and to meet misrepresentation with truth. To this extent, at least, progress has been made.

The issue between the two parties will in this way be simplified, and will become a fight for a cheapening of the necessities of life through a reduction of excessive imports on everything that enters into the daily consumption of the people, against free whisky, to be procured by a repeal of the internal taxes on distilled spirits, the surplus serving as a very dark lantern to expose the inequalities and false pretensions of an economic system that, not content with robbing millions to enrich a few, has piled up a useless fund in the treasury, to be stolen or wasted.

Hitherto, the Republicans have had it pretty much their own way, construing and misconstruing Democratic tariff utterances to suit themselves. The question has now descended from the heights of theory to the dead-level of business, and it must be considered in a businesslike way; as, in fact, the Democratic leaders in Congress have always proposed to consider it, but as, unfortunately, certain Democratic bosses out of Congress, and directly concerned in protected monopolies, have not had the honesty or courage to meet it. Thus submitted to the people, the Republicans will discover it a horse of quite another color than the grotesque effigy they have for years set up.

IV.

The Red Republi-
cans and Their
Sectional Issue.

The single issue on which the Republican party leaders are united, and to which they can and will appeal with confidence and enthusiasm, is the sectional issue. They hope, if they do not believe, that in the folds of the "bloody shirt" one more President is enwrapped, and, whether there be or not, the "bloody shirt" is a never-failing recourse of waning party spirit, and can, in extremities, be relied on to serve many party purposes. We may look, therefore, to see it enter very early in the coming session as the opposition shibboleth and ensign ; an oriflamme to inspire the Republicans and a red-rag to goad the Democrats.

Two excellent pretexts are right at hand by which this may be done ; the introduction of a pension bill more sweeping than that vetoed by the President, and a fusillade of partisan resolutions touching crimes alleged against the franchise in the South.

In both these plans of campaign the ground may be found uncertain, if not untenable. There is a limit to the just claims of the soldier upon the bounty of the Government, which must be admitted even by the Grand Army of the Republic ; and when our pension laws are compared with those of other countries, thoughtful men are disposed to ask themselves whether this limit was not reached long ago. Indeed, a pretty general belief has taken hold of the public mind that thrift lies at the bottom of that excess of loyalty which so delights in appropriating the money of others, and a suspicion is gaining currency that the resonance of the patriotic clamor which followed the veto of the Dependent Pension Act was largely the work of the claim agents. As to complaints against the operation of the franchise in the South, it is worth no man's while to say that they are without foundation. But it is true to declare that the negro in Mississippi is no worse off in this regard than his ignorant white yoke-mate in Massachusetts ; and it is positively certain that no remedy this side of the millennium can be reached short of a total revolution in the spirit and machinery of our Government.

During one entire decade the Republicans had it all their own way in the South. They enfranchised the blacks *en masse*. Very nearly *en masse*, they disfranchised the whites. The army and navy were sent to carry out the scheme of *bouleversement*, which went by the name of Reconstruction. After ten years of

trial it fell by its own weight and rottenness. Who shall propose seriously to go back to it and to set it up again? Yet, if this be not the purpose of the agitation of the question in its sectional form, what purpose have the Republicans in forcing it upon the country? Their outcry is very great, and, doubtless, it is very sincere. Obligated at last to take a dose of their own medicine, they like it no better than those for whom it was originally compounded liked it. In short, now as ever, it makes a considerable difference whose ox is gored.

The true answer which reason and justice have to give impatient criticism in this matter may be summed up as follows: Government must rest upon a responsible basis; that basis does not exist among the blacks of the South, and, where they are in a numerical majority, society will find some means for its own preservation; but, on the other hand, society is concerned in law and order, and can be trusted, in its own behalf, to maintain these, wherever left to itself. During the reign of force, society had no other recourse than force, and, as an inevitable consequence, a bloody record of violence ensued. Thrown upon its own resources, society was not slow to seek milder, but not less efficacious, measures of defense against the preponderating mass of ignorance and barbarism. If the native white population were removed and replaced by an equal number of extreme Republicans the outcome would be the same. It is not a sectional, or party, but a race question.

But, considering the case from a party standpoint, the Red Republican leaders can never unite the North against the South upon any sentiment of hostility based upon old sectional prejudices and antagonisms. There is nothing to sustain the attempt, except a job-lot of obsolete partisan freaks and fancies, which will be everywhere met by the contradicting actualities of love, commerce, and religion. The day when it was argued that one Southern man could whip six Yankees with a corn-stalk is not deader than the day when it was thought the first duty of patriotism to make treason odious and to punish traitors. But the South can always be united in its own defense against an agrarianism which loses none of its terror because it happens to be black, and gains nothing of consideration in the circumstance that it is led by a few white men claiming exclusive loyalty.

The moment outside pressure is withdrawn parties will divide

in the South. Whilst outside pressure is applied, the simplest law of self-preservation will keep the white people together. If the Republican idea had any breadth or forecast to it, it would realize this truth, and, accepting it, would bury the bloody shirt, and seek in the South an honorable, responsible, and logical following. It will find such a following awaiting it whenever it has the courage to go in quest of it.

These, then, are the grounds on which the Democratic party may stand and defend its position against the simulation of an implacable hatred on the part of the Red Republicans. No such hatred exists among the masses of the North, nor can any such be justified by fair-minded men. The people of the South are no more perfect than the people of the North, but they are just as law-abiding, patriotic, and humane, and are equally interested in the maintenance of their domestic integrity and in the national well being. The genius of our free-fabric is home rule, nowhere clung to with more tenacity than in New England, and as reasonably might Texas set herself to dictate internal policies to Maine and Vermont as that a party, wholly sectional, should seek to lay out the Southern States upon a six-inch Puritan foot-rule. Each community must regulate itself, and be left to itself. In the long run good, and not bad forces will predominate, because it is in every case the interest of society to seek the good, and not the bad, in the business of self-government.

V.

A Charcoal Sketch of the Political Situation. In taking an inventory of the possibilities and probabilities of the political situation, two forces are attracting an attention greater than they deserve. These are the Mugwumps and the Socialists. The Mugwump is the professional gentleman in politics. The Socialist is the professional adventurer. Neither seems quite clear in his mind, or steady in his aim; yet both affect confidence in the virtue of certain nostrums which they have put upon the market.

Indeed, to be strictly accurate, there is a third claimant for the recognition of mankind in general, and the notice of the people of the United States in particular, who has as good a right and as strong a case as the Mugwump or the Socialist,—I mean the Prohibitionist. In spite of the black eye he got in Texas the other day, he, too, will be around next year, confusing the managers and upsetting calculations.

All these factions play into the hands of the Democratic party. The Mugwumps, if they contribute nothing else, supply it a much-needed press, and the Prohibitionists will cut at least as deeply into the Republican vote as the Socialists are likely to cut into the Democratic vote. As long as the President continues to regard himself, and to wish to be regarded as better than his party, he will satisfy the Mugwumps. Whether he will displease the rank and file of Democrats sufficiently to cost him the absence of enough Democrats at the polls to lose him his election remains to be seen. He has made up an issue largely personal, supporting this issue with a great array of practical and valuable reforms in the conduct of the Government, particularly with respect to the public lands. Even at this moment it is the administration against the field, and, having brought the leaders of his party to a complete, though unwilling, subjection, the President will appeal to the whole vote of the country for a confirmation of his title. No disinterested man, who takes the trouble thoughtfully to examine this title, can fail to see that it has a weight not usually ascribed to it by the professional politicians. To contest it, successfully, will require all the resources and address the Republicans are able to muster, and even at their best they can hope to set it aside only through the defection of Democrats in the States of New York and Indiana.

These are, of course, mere speculations, and in affairs of this description one man's surmise may be said to be as good as another's, since it is given to no man to foretell the issue of a horse-race, the verdict of a petit-jury, or the result of an election. They are thrown out more than twelve months in advance of the events to which they relate, rather in the way of suggestion than in the way of prophecy, and have no claim to consideration other than that of a disinterested attempt to get at the truth, as it is, without malice or fear or favor; being, in fact, but the mid-summer essay of an off-year in political criticism. Nevertheless, the belief is held by the writer that he has given a charcoal sketch of the present condition of the country, and the actual state of parties, which those professionally and personally concerned may peruse, not without profit to themselves, and which may amuse, if they do not instruct, that great multitude of good Americans who care little what happens so it does not happen to them.

HENRY WATTERSON.